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FOREIGN DEPARTMENT

IN CHARGE OF
LAVINA L. DOCK, R.N.

THE FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE SCHOOL IN FRANCE

BY GRACE ELLISON¹

For over seventeen years now, the teaching of Florence Nightingale has been put into practice at the Maison de Sante Protestante, Bordeaux, and to a woman of British origin, Dr. Anna Hamilton, is due the honor of introducing the work of our great British pioneer into France.

Up to the time of the separation of the French Church and State, French nursing had been almost exclusively in the hands of the nuns; but, unfortunately, the nuns were allowed to leave France before there was time to train other women to take their place.

It was in the year 1900 that Dr. Anna Hamilton presented, at the University of Montpellier, the most brilliant and complete thesis of the year—a thesis which had taken her three years to write. During the years that she had studied for her medical degree and walked the hospitals at Marseilles and Montpellier, she was struck by the unnecessary suffering of the patients, first of all from bad nursing, and, secondly, from being considered as specimens from which students were to learn their profession, rather than as sick and suffering mortals. Dr. A. Hamilton was born at Florence, the birthplace of Florence Nightingale, and had from an early age read and digested the "Notes on Nursing" and all the writings of Florence Nightingale that she could procure. She was therefore soon awake to the many reforms necessary in French hospital life, and particularly to the need of educated women of high moral character to complete the work of the doctors, as nurses. Accordingly she chose as the subject of her thesis, "Hospital Nurses," making several journeys to England in order to study the question first-hand and to give chapter and verse for all her statements. The thesis is a history of nursing from the fourth century up to the present day, showing the disadvantage of nursing being in the hands of either nuns or deaconesses; also the faults in the teaching of the existing French lay schools and the French Red Cross. Then it introduces the Florence Nightingale system of nursing as the only system which can give the best results.

¹ Miss Ellison is an Englishwoman who founded the French Flag Nursing Corps of English nurses, which was supervised by Mrs. Bedford Fenwick. Miss Ellison is now on her way to this country.—Ed.

Dr. Hamilton then set to work to find a hospital where she could introduce the principles of Florence Nightingale, and an opportunity presented itself in the Protestant Hospital, Bordeaux, where she became and is still the resident physician and superintendent of the hospital.

To start the nursing school she brought Miss Elston from England. Her task has not been an easy one—no pioneer work is easy—and for many years it was hard to find French women of education who would undertake to become professional nurses, without the protection of a nun's veil to shield them from the criticism to which such persons taking up a profession like nursing are exposed, even to-day, in France. But the work of Dr. Hamilton is becoming known in France as it is known in the United States, and it is gratifying to see the American medical and nursing delegations as they land in Bordeaux, come to pay their respects to the founder of the Florence Nightingale nursing school in France.

When Dr. Hamilton first expressed her ideas about nursing, few took the trouble to follow such revolutionary ideas. Now, however, she has had an opportunity of showing what she can do, and not only has she turned her hospital into one that can vie with any of our British hospitals for cleanliness, comfort and good nursing, but she has trained educated women as first-class nurses.

In 1914, a splendid gift was made through Dr. Hamilton by a lady in Bordeaux, Mdlle. Elizabeth Bosc, who during her lifetime had taken the keenest interest in the training of nurses, and watched the work gradually extending. On her death, her beautiful house and domain of sixteen acres, with a farm and the flowers and fruit trees, were left to the hospital to build a much enlarged hospital and school. Mdlle. Bosc felt what a necessary work it was to train good nurses, and she wanted to double the number; she felt, also, what a fine thing it would be for the poor of Bordeaux and the foreign sailors, for whom the Protestant Hospital was originally built, to enjoy the fine fresh air and beautiful surroundings of the home she loved. But funds were needed to build the hospital; war broke out, and money became very scarce. Yet such a good and necessary work must and will find support. Which country will have the privilege of setting this scheme on foot—Florence Nightingale's native land or the United States of America, where her teaching is best put into practice?

American delegates have come to France to help in all good works, and above all to help France to help herself; they have come to start dispensaries to fight the great white plague tuberculosis, to care for the orphans and refugees—perhaps they have already seen that for all these works they must have trained nurses.

The professional value of the school is incontestable. Besides the tribute paid by the American experts, Misses Dock and Nutting, we have the opinion of the greatest living nursing expert, Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, who has visited the site of the future school. She writes:

The work is a wonderful educational work, and it would be of the greatest benefit as a standard of nursing in France. The school should not only be extended, but imitated in other localities, and we imagine no greater work connected with reconstruction than the provision of thoroughly qualified French nurses.

Dr. Hamilton is naturally proud of this professional appreciation from the pen of a woman who for forty years has never ceased to defend the interests of nursing.

Dr. Hamilton is a naturalized Frenchwoman. Her mother is French, and her uncle, the celebrated French Protestant preacher, Leon Pilatte, is the founder of the "Eglise Libre." On her father's side she descends from the Scotch Hamiltons, and to her great-grandfather, General Sir Wm. Ponsonby, a monument has been erected by public subscription in St. Paul's Cathedral for his services on the field of Waterloo. We feel sure that if the need of help to enlarge her hospital were better known, help would be sent to her at once. Who will help in this work of mercy?

THE RED CROSS CHATAUQUA PROGRAMME

The Department of Nursing of the American Red Cross is still energetically searching out Red Cross nurses who would be interested in becoming "Wandering Troubadours of Health." The service will be for June, July, and August, and the itineraries extend from New England to the Miami, across the fertile corn belt to the Rocky Mountains, blazing pioneer trails through the coast towns of Texas and Arizona, up through the Royal Gorge, northwestward to the lumber camps of Washington and Oregon, and down to the great fruit country of southern California.

If the spell of the "open road" comes upon you, if you want to go out through little towns and hamlets, among audiences which have come down the mountains bringing their families in ox-carts, with the hogs and cow following along behind, to hear you, among "rich men, poor men, beggar-men," the Department of Nursing at Red Cross National headquarters, Washington, D. C., will be glad to consider your applications and qualifications for such service. All nurses who have had overseas experience are preferred, as it immediately establishes a point of interest in the minds of the audience.